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A Dialogue on Education for Autonomy: An Interview

Thomas S. Szasz
State University of New York

Ronald M. Swartz
Oakland University. Michigan

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The school... serves the living. It should develop in the young individuals those qualities and capabilities which are of value for-the welfare of the commonwealth. But that does not mean that individuality should be destroyed and the individual become a mere tool of the community, like a bee or an ant. For a community of standardized individuals without personal originality and personal aims would be a poor community without possibilities for development. On the contrary, the aim must be the training of independently acting and thinking individuals. — Albert Einstein

No man is fit to educate unless he feels each pupil an end in himself, with his own rights and his own personality, not merely a piece in a jig-saw puzzle, or a soldier in a regiment, or a citizen in a State. Reverence for human personality is the beginning of wisdom, in every social question, but above all in education. — Bertrand Russell

Swartz: We have been talking about many different educational issues since we met at the airport over six hours ago. And I find it interesting that we have said so little about the education of doctors, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts; surely you have some thoughts about the education of the vast number of students who have attended your classes over the last three decades.

Szasz: Years ago 1 wrote some articles about the education of psychoanalysts. Have you seen them? They are titled "Psycho-Analytic Training: A Socio-Psychological Analysis of its History and Present Status" (1958) and "Three Problems in Contemporary Psychoanalytic Training" (1960).

Swartz: I have read your papers on psychoanalytic training and 1 think they contain a number of significant insights. Specifically, there is much merit in your suggestion mat psychoanalytic educational programs should incorporate Albert Einstein's idea that "the spirit of free inquiry needs freedom above everything else." Moreover, I found it quite interesting that your recommendations for improving the education of psychoanalysts emphasize the importance of Bertrand Russell's views related to reducing the power that teachers have over their students.

Szasz: You know that the papers we are talking about were written years ago. During 1958 or '59, I think.

Swartz: Was that much after you had finished your own psychoanalytic training?

Szasz: I finished my training in 1950 at the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis. The articles were written in the mid-1950s, but they were kicking around for a few years before they were published.

Swartz: Your papers on psychoanalytic training contain some arguments that are perhaps no longer relevant for training institutes in the 1980s. In particular, your criticisms associated with the pledge that students took in the 1950s are now somewhat dated because many training centres no longer require that new recruits take a pledge.

And I think you are wrong to assume that the educational ideas of Einstein and Russell "do not apply to the education of children" (1958). In a number of my essays I have tried to explain that some young people could greatly benefit from schools based upon the liberal ideals suggested in the educational writings of Einstein, Russell, and others such as Karl Popper, A. S. Neil!, and Homer Lane.

Szasz: Before we begin to discuss issues such as the education of psychoanalysts, I think it would be helpful if you would summarize some of the points we covered earlier today.

Swartz: One issue that needs to be made clearer is the power relationship between children and adults. I think your view is that children do not need more power to influence their lives, but what is needed is that less power should be given to the adults who help children learn. Have I stated your position correctly?

Szasz: Yes, you have. But that goes not only for adults, it goes for anyone who interacts with children: the institutions that influence a child's life and the representatives of institutions, such as psychiatrists.

Swartz: So, as you see matters, it is important that we develop Institutional policies that check or diminish the power that adults have over children.

Szasz: Diminish the institutional power that parents, teachers, psychiatrists, etc. have over children.

Swartz: But you're not willing to endorse the educational views of someone such as Neill. And if I understand you correctly, your disagreement with people like Neill and Russell is that you think they gave too much power to the children who attended their experimental schools.

Szasz: Not quite. They gave them the illusion of power or independence. I do not think it is possible for children to be as powerful — or as self-determining — as Neill and Russell thought they could be.

Swartz: From your point of view it is inappropriate to give children the kind of power that Neill said he gave to the children at Summerhill because (1) it is too overwhelming — too much of a burden — for children to exercise the kind of power Neill wanted them to have, and (2) the power given to the students at Summerhill docs not help to prepare them for society — that is. for doing something that others will value and pay for.

Szasz: Exactly. What Neill was doing was phony; he did nothing to really compensate for the actual power of adults. He did not protect children from the power of adults. It was like giving someone a sword when his adversary has a machine gun.

Swartz: And to some extent adult power is natural as you see it.

Szasz: It's inherent in human nature. Adults are bigger, stronger, and usually know more than children. It's as simple as that. It's absurd to overlook or deny that. We must recognize it and try to protect children from the misuse of the power of adults. As I see it, this is really the core, the paradigm, of the classic political problem of who shall guard the guardians.

Swartz: It seems to me that your idea of trying to diminish the power that adults have over children is consistent with your recommendation that it is desirable to eliminate child psychiatry. However, under present circumstances parents, teachers, and other adult authorities can use their power to send kids to a child psychiatrist.

Szasz: Let me interrupt before we go further with this. Given the way child psychiatry is now, given what it is — how it is practised — now, yes, I would want it abolished. ,

Swartz: Can you describe conditions which would make child psychiatry acceptable to you?

Szasz: I might find child psychiatry acceptable if children were effectively protected from any kind of psychiatric intrusion. Specifically, physical coercion, confinement, drugs, electric shock, and so forth should not be viewed as legitimate ways to treat children who exhibit behaviours that do not conform to the social expectations of adults. I am suggesting that we view psychiatry like religion: going to a psychiatrist should be viewed like going to a priest or a rabbi. If psychiatry were like this, then I would not want to take it away from parents; I would still want to take it away from the school and from the state, however.

Swartz: Of course, the conditions in which you would approve of child psychiatry do not exist now. Do you know for a fact that some psychiatrists presently use electroconvulsive therapy with children?

Szasz: I doubt that they do any more in this country, but they used to. In Japan, electric shock was widely used to treat children. And don't forget child psychiatrists regularly prescribe psychiatric drugs such as Ritalin, Thorazine, and Haldol.

Swartz: In your writings you often equate drug treatment with such things as electric shock. And with certain drugs the potential harmful and irreversible side effects may even be greater than electric shock.

Szasz: I do not want to get involved in the technicalities. Anything that is ingested or injected into the body should be forbidden and any physical confinement in a space should be forbidden. In short, a child psychiatrist should have the same opportunities to influence behaviour that Sunday school teachers presently have. No more, no less.

Swartz: I like the idea of viewing psychiatrists as Sunday school teachers, but I doubt very much if this lowering of the status of psychiatrists will come about in the near future. Also, it is

presently the case that teachers who work under compulsory educational laws are given {he unreasonable charge to "educate" every student in their classes. And some of the students whom teachers come in contact with are impossible to educate in the sense in which the school expects. Thus, we now have a large population of what is euphemistically called . "special education." And there are groups of people called "special educators" who rely on psychiatrists to use whatever means are available to get children "under control." Do you have any recommendations for parents and teachers who must deal with children who are uncontrollable?

Szasz: Let's back-track. I believe that to make an impact, to make an improvement so to speak, in any of these things, we have to be crystal clear about some elementary issues and our particular stance toward them. Specifically, we need to ask the question: "On whose turf are we operating?" We are always operating on somebody's turf, on somebody's territory, where that person has the authority to do something. So let's look at the public schools in this light. What do we see? We see that the public schools are social institutions that are clearly not the child's turf; they are not even the parents' turf or the teachers' turf. The public schools are the turf on which the state holds children, teachers, and parents as hostages or prisoners.

Swartz: It's important to emphasize here that you view teachers as part of the group of people who are prisoners in the public schools.

Szasz: Teachers as much as children, yes. Teachers have very little control over the way public schools are operated. And children have, or are usually given, very little choice over where or what kind of schooling they should get.

Swartz: Would you go so for as to say that children should be free to leave school if they wished?

Szasz: Children should be free to leave as much as possible, but I would not go so far as to say that a child should be able to choose not to be educated in some way that has been dictated by adults. As I told you earlier, 1 view childhood as a kind of slavery. It is important to let children know that at some specified age they will be free and, in general, they should be set free fairly early. Compulsory school attendance past the age of 16 or even earlier is undesirable, from this point of view. Moreover, the customers of schooling must have some power to reject the service being offered; I think of parents as the customers. And the seller of the service must be free to refuse the service. The initial condition for a decent, dignified, workable human interaction is that all parties involved consent to do something together.

Swartz: So, as you see matters, the education of children who are placed in special education schools and classrooms can only be successful if we somehow gain the child's consent or co-operation. Even if we have the consent of parents, children will not learn unless they agree to co-operate with something that we can call the "game of education."

Szasz: Isn't that too abstract, too idealistic? My impression is that the so-called schools that special education students go to are nothing more than daytime prisons which free parents from the burden of taking care of their children.

Swartz: I'm sure you know that Paul Goodman (1956, 1962) used to equate schools with prisons and even concentration camps. But I think the metaphor of the prison really distorts what is going on in most schools. In place of the metaphor of the prison, I like to use what I refer to as the metaphor of the locked movie house (Swartz, 1974). That is, schools can be viewed as a movie theatre where the doors are locked and there is a third-rate movie being played on the screen. And a major reason why I like the metaphor of the locked movie house is that it incorporates the idea of confinement, but it also avoids implying that teachers and other school officials are jail keepers and wardens. Furthermore, it is unfortunate that teachers usually are not very interesting entertainers and their material leaves a lot to be desired. Thus, going to.school is often like going to a bad movie and you can't get out. Sometimes you can't even go to the washroom unless you get permission from the person on stage. And even if the popcorn is stale many kids prefer to eat it rather than starve.

Briefly put, schools can be viewed as a form of confinement, but, with the exception of some urban schools where armed guards are at every door, it is a grave distortion to think of our modern schools as common prisons. And, of course, the system of schooling as it presently exists would not be able to maintain itself if numerous people did not deceive themselves or lie about what is actually going on in school.

Szasz: I was not being metaphorical when I said schools arc daytime prisons for children. When 1 was a student, I often thought I was a prisoner. In. a sense schools are prisons, but they are not necessarily bad because of this. There can be good prisons, you know. Your idea of viewing the school as a locked movie house is perhaps even better, because it highlights some of the problems that plague our modern educational institutions. For example, those children who want to learn, or enjoy the movie as you might say, cannot do so because other children are making noise and disturbing the peace. When schools are not allowed to remove disruptive students, then it is wholly hypocritical to assert that they can nevertheless help those who want to learn.

Swartz: At times disruptive students are removed from the classroom. In fact, to a large extent special education students are those who have been removed. Specifically, those students who are labelled or diagnosed as emotionally disturbed are often removed from the normal classroom setting.

Szasz: But, by and large, it's very hard to be removed from the normal school situation. Schools are filled with kids who are not performing, at least in the sense in which I would expect them to perform in school.

Swartz: Are you suggesting that the academic performance of students is below what you think is desirable?

Szasz: That's putting it very mildly. I am. talking about performing academically in the same sense that we expect medical students or law students to perform. If they don't perform academically, they get thrown out.

Swartz: It seems to me that you have a very traditional notion about what a good school is. And your emphasis on schools expecting high academic performance is a bit aid fashioned as 1 see

matters. Nevertheless, I do think you are making an important point when you suggest that teachers must have the option to deny their services to some students.

Szasz: As long as teachers don't have that option they will not be able to do a good job. To understand why it is so important for schools to deny their services to some students, we can use the example of a sports team. If you don't play well on a hockey team or a football team, then next Saturday you don't get to play.

Swartz: But in hockey and other sports there are different leagues for the various levels of athletic ability. And the kind of performance expected in most sports is a bit easier to evaluate than academic achievement.

Szasz: I don't want to get into a discussion here about what counts as a "good" academic performance. As you seem to have guessed, 1 have very little quarrel with the traditional standards and ways of evaluating academic achievement. What I want to emphasize is that our educational system, and in particular the public schools, make it very difficult, and at times even impossible, for students to have the opportunity to perform academically if they can and want to do so. 1 feel strongly that students who are not performing properly academically should not be allowed to hinder the academic accomplishments of those who do. And just because I like academically oriented schools, it does not follow that I wish to see only these kinds of programs in public school systems. What we need are lots of different kinds of public schools and lots of schools for different levels of academic achievement.

Swartz: Unfortunately, public school systems do not usually provide students with the opportunity to choose the kind of school they are best suited for. This lack of choice is a real deficiency in most public school systems.

Szasz: The lack of choice in our public school system is best viewed as a fingerprint, rather than as a deficiency. The absence of choice is emblematic of the fact that many Americans believe that the public schools should make Whites be like Blacks, Blacks be like Whites, poor like rich — everybody equal. The public schools in countries such as the United States are not used primarily to educate children; they are used to socialize and equalize.

Swartz: What 1 think we are both saying here is that the schools have a function far beyond schooling and academic education. In your essay, "Mental Health Services in the School" (1970) you make this point very explicitly when you talk about the antagonistic relationship between education and socialization.

Szasz: In the American public schools education is really quite secondary. What is important is socialization. Also, these schools help to keep people out of the labour force and they make it possible for parents to work without worrying about daycare for their children. These unacknowledged, but significant, functions of schools were noted by Paul Goodman years ago.

Swartz: But those who run and support the public schools find it extremely difficult to own up to the reality that state controlled schooling is often nothing more than socialization for life as we know it. And as you point out in your interview with Paul Kurtz (Szasz. 1977). education that is "financed and legitimized by the state" is likely to become "propaganda." Yet, this propaganda is not acknowledged. Thus, schools have lots of books and other academic

paraphernalia which are rarely used for educating people; many of the academic rituals associated with modern schooling have little substance for a large number of the students and teachers who religiously go to school. And the pretence that any society can force ail children to do academic work is to some extent easy to see through.

Szasz: On the one hand it is easy to see the failure of the schools, because many kids learn very little during their time in school. On the other hand, the failure of the schools is not so obvious because these institutions now provide so many other services that people value: food, medical care, psychiatric care, and a host of other services. Thus, what has happened is that the schools have increasingly become a substitute for the home and the parents. The only thing that stops the schools from replacing the home is that children don't sleep there.

Swartz: To some extent we agree that schools in modern societies are misnamed, what we are talking about are community centres, which provide daycare. Nonetheless, a major reason why I wanted to talk to you is because I would like to know what you would recommend to parents and teachers who find themselves interacting with children who do not co-operate with the "game of schooling." As I am sure you know, a number of students who attend our schools engage in a vast variety of anti-social behaviours: bite on their pencils too enthusiastically, use their pencils to poke someone, and a few students may wish to masturbate in class. Behaviours such as these are not usually tolerated in normal classrooms. Thus, if students persist in their efforts to be different, then they are labelled emotionally disturbed and classified as special education students.

What recommendations do you have for those adults who have to interact with children who don't co-operate with the normal expectations of our schools?

Szasz: In order to approach your question modestly and humanely, I would have to look upon the specific behaviour of every individual child very carefully. I would not want to generalize too much because, by and large, the behaviours you have mentioned can be viewed as some kind of non-specific signal that there is a round peg in a square hole. The question would then be, "How did this round peg get into this square hole?" Perhaps the child in question would just prefer to be in some other kind of school, for a variety of reasons. In other words, we would have to find out why this particular child is mismatched with this particular school and what is it that he or she would prefer, what it is that his or her parents want. It is important to know to what extent (he observed behaviour is a consequence of the fact that the child has so little choice. I think that if children were offered choices, then this in itself might eliminate a large part of the problems associated with the kind of unwanted behaviours you mentioned. Of course. I am assuming that if a person doesn't fit in one place, he or she would fit in some other place.

Swartz: I think that what you are saying here is very reasonable. But I don't think that it's going to be implemented. Unfortunately, most people view the very practical suggestion for more choice as Unpractical. And besides, the school system is in many ways a monolithic structure which tries to eliminate choices for a variety of reasons.

Szasz: That's correct. This might be the right time to point out that, in tact, the school system and the psychiatric system are very similar: ostensibly both are designed for a client population, but actually both serve the people who want to get rid of the clients in some way.

Swartz: When you say mental hospitals and schools are designed to "get rid of their clients" do you mean that the people who work for these institutions want their clients to grow and develop so they can go to other places?

Szasz: God no! I mean just the opposite. The growth and development of students and so-called psychiatric patients are not really important for teachers, psychiatrists, and the other personnel who work for the schools and mental hospitals. Of course, teachers and institutional psychiatrists often believe that their primary job is to help their clients. And sometimes professionals in the schools and mental hospitals may do some good for those they come in contact with. That's not the point. The point is that the professionals who provide services in places such as the public schools and state mental hospitals don't really have to do much for their clients; teachers and institutional.psychiatrists typically want their clients to give them as little work or trouble as possible.

In order to understand why public schools and state mental hospitals do not have to service their nominal clients, we must keep in mind that these institutions involve human transactions which include three parties: (1) students and mental patients, (2) teachers and psychiatrists, (3) the parents of students, the relatives of psychiatric patients, and the representatives of the state, such as judges. Now, the third parties in these transactions do not, by and large, want to be bothered with the first parties. A major reason why we have schools and mental hospitals is because the third party wants someone else to. take care of the first party. Given this state of affairs, it is obvious, but difficult to accept, that public school teachers and state hospital psychiatrists have very little incentive to help their clients. Their rewards do not depend upon doing something good for their client, but upon satisfying the constituency of the third party.

Swartz: You seem to be saying that the professionals who work in public schools and state psychiatric hospitals don't really want to deal with the people who are coming to them for help.

Szasz: That's almost right. But don't forget that in the human situations we are talking about the client does not really come to the professional. Essentially, we are talking about involuntary arrangements. If you left all the doors open in schools and state mental hospitals, and if you gave other options to people, then many of those being "helped" by teachers and psychiatrists would go somewhere else. For example, if there was a Holiday Inn down the street that would admit them without payment, many mental patients might check into it. If the Holiday Inn provided the same support as a mental hospital, and if the Holiday Inn gave a person room and board without drugs and the usual psychiatric mish-mash, then many people would, I dare say, find this an attractive alternative to a state psychiatric hospital.

Swartz: Basically what you seem to be suggesting is that there is a need to offer a greater variety of alternatives to both students and psychiatric patients. Also, your arguments seem to imply that many of the problems associated with misbehaviour or deviant behaviour might be solved or eliminated if alternative environments were provided for those students who presently do not "fit" into the existing monolithic educational system.

Szasz: My guess is that 90 percent of the problems would no longer be seen as problems if we could provide more types of learning situations for students. Of course, this is only a guess: much would depend on how creative adults would be in providing alternatives to the existing ways of educating children. What we need is some kind of voucher system, a la Milton Friedman (1965). where parents could choose from two hundred different schools. And if parents want to keep the money and educate their children at home they should be given that option, too. It might do wonders for strengthening the family.

Swartz: But do you have any recommendations for what people should do under the present circumstances where choices are not really available?

Szasz: There is probably nothing one can do with the monolithic structure we have got.

Swartz: What I think I'm getting at is something that Paul Goodman said about schooling (see Goodman, 1956, 1962, 1970. 1977). Specifically, one of Goodman's most important points is that the deviant child who is not "playing the game of schooling" is making a non-verbal or behavioural request for an alternative learning environment. And Goodman never tired of pointing out that the educational system in the United States was inadequate partly because it viewed education in an extremely narrow sense. Yet, regrettably. Goodman romanticized the rebel because he said the rebel's insights were better than other people's ideas. I think we make a mistake if we elevate the rebel's opinion to the "truth." Nevertheless, Goodman's point about rebels' saying something significant should not be ignored.

Szasz: I am completely with you about not romanticizing the rebel. The rebel's insights are no better than anyone else's. We are all in the same Iroat.

Swartz: And the insight about providing alternative environments is not being incorporated into the educational system. Moreover, when students arc placed in special education classrooms this so-called alternative has a negative social stigma associated with it. And often students must put up with a great deal of what you referred to as psychiatric mish-mash.

Szasz: Actually, only lower-class parents are restricted in their choice of alternatives. If you are rich and the school system is not servicing your child adequately, then you can move to the suburbs, find a private school, or send your child to live with an aunt.

Swartz: Money is not the only limitation. Sometimes wealthy parents are the ones who are least interested in finding the kind of learning environment that is most appropriate for their child.

Szasz: You are right. I am tempted to come back, again, to the theme that childhood is both a prison sentence and a lottery. The kind of family you are born into is a matter of luck.

Swartz: Part of what I think I am getting at here is that we have to be a bit critical of a system (hat relies almost entirely on parental authority or judgments; parents have a great capacity to misperceive or ignore the best interests of their children. Also, let's not forget that parents are often the first ones to suggest that their kid needs to see a psychiatrist. And when parents bring their kid to a child psychiatrist (he message they are likely to give is something such as. "Here, you shape this kid up. I couldn't do it. You make this kid fit into normal society." In short, parents are at times the ones least likely to help their children.

Szasz: You arc now raising the question. "In what ways and at what times should the state interfere with parental decisions?"

Swartz: We both agree that at some point it is reasonable far the state to intervene and > protect children from their parents.

Szasz: We agree on the necessity, in principle, of some state intervention. But it is important to be clear about the way the state might intervene in a persons lire. For example, requiring every child to learn lo read and write is a much less intrusive requirement than requiring him to attend a particular kind of school. Actually, mass public education in America is only a cover under which the state smuggles in coercion for certain societal purposes, such as conformity to existing institutions, learning obedience, taking power away from parents.

Swartz: If I understand you correctly, you think the public schools should restrict their function to transmitting information and not influencing opinion. In *Sex By Prescription* (1980) you make this point clear when you say that sex education can be viewed as an attempt to influence behaviour and opinion, rather than inform students about the reproductive process.

Szasz: Weil, not really, I do not want to restrict the function of schools to any one thing. Remember. I would like our society to offer hundreds of educational alternatives. I think it would be best to have some kind of contact between parents and teachers, parents and schools. Although I have a great fondness for the academic education I received in Hungary over 50 years ago, I do not want all schools to conform to my ideal. My point is that public schooling in America is so bad partly because it is so inconsistent with the classical 19th century liberal view of the state as an organ whose primary functions are: (1) to coerce people to respect the individual rights and property of others, and (2) to protect people from foreign and domestic enemies. This libertarian ideal of the state has been replaced with a paternalistic therapeutic model of it — with the stale as provider of basic necessities, such as education, information, health, and so forth.

Swartz: Your suggestions about the need to make public schools function in a more capitalistic fashion have much merit. However, even if we could make the public schools function in a more capitalistic fashion, we would still need some state regulations about the kinds of alternatives that should be viewed as socially acceptable. After all, we don't want to condone educational alternatives that starve or physically mutilate kids in order to make them learn what parents and teachers might consider to be important.

Szasz: Ron, I am not an anarchist! I strongly believe that in a decent society die state must, at times, interfere in the lives of people. The point is that the state has now too much power to influence those aspects of our lives which 1 think are best handled by the individual himself. Let's stand back for a minute and look at why people don't want to make the public schools function in a mote capitalistic-entrepreneurial manner. What would be lost if public schools did provide hundreds of educational alternatives?

Swartz: Part of what might be lost is the idea that the public schools can somehow provide equal educational opportunity for all students. After all, if there is primarily one educational alternative, then it is easy for people to jump to the erroneous conclusion that all kids are

getting an equal education. Of course, as Goodman pointed out years ago, the dominant way of educating kids does not equalize educational opportunity because many kids just cannot take advantage of what schools have to offer. For Goodman equal educational opportunity was transformed to mean that all kids should have the opportunity to try their hand at whatever educational alternative a society might make available at any time. And for Goodman the results of the diverse educational alternatives offered might indeed be very varied (see Goodman, 1956, 1962, 1963, 1970, 1977; Swartz, 1982). Yet, in the 1980s influential educational thinkers such as Mortimer Adler (1982) now write about having the "same course of study for ail." And in many ways your suggestion for hundreds of educational alternatives is an old idea that the American public schools have yet to incorporate in a meaningful way. My guess is that the public schools' attempt to provide the same education for all helps to reinforce the idea that social institutions can somehow "make life fair."

Szasz: It's very important for people to believe in the myth that social institutions can make life fair. It's difficult to accept how unfair life can be, perhaps especially in a society as rich and varied as ours.

Swartz: In other words, the public schools are saddled with an impossible charge. It's a myth to think that the public schools can make life fair by merely attempting to teach all kids the same things.

Szasz: Nevertheless, many people believe that it is possible to provide the same education for all kids. So long as poor people believe that their children are getting as good an education as rich people's, the public schools can continue to "do business as usual."

Swartz: Not only do many people, both rich and poor, believe in the myth that public schools can teach all kids the same things, but there are now many support services that reinforce this myth. As you point out in your essay "Mental Health Services in the Schools" (1970), psychiatrists have joined with the schools to help make kids fit into the dominant learning environment that schools now provide. In effect, many psychiatrists who now work for the schools are saying something like, "We will take your malcontents and somehow get them back into the fold. And if we cannot do this we will keep deviant students in places where they will not upset the system."

This "marriage" between the public schools and the psychiatric establishment is indeed a potent coalition which, as 1 see matters, has become more powerful in the last quarter of a century. And your essay raises issues that are as relevant (or perhaps even more relevant) for today as they were in the 1960s.

Szasz: I think the psychiatric establishment is now more powerful than it was when I wrote the Myth of Mental Illness, over a quarter of a century ago.

Swartz: I think it is clear that the mass of written work you have done in the last three decades has not been able to help reverse the trend to give psychiatrists power to influence the way people behave. Also, what I find so significant about your essay "Critical Reflections on Child Psychiatry" (1978) is that this paper clearly explains why and how children need to be protected from psychiatric interventions. But the combined power of the public school system and the

psychiatric establishment is now a potent force which works to make all kids conform to one type of learning environment.

Szasz: As you know, 1 do not believe in any kind of a conspiratorial explanation of human events.

Swartz: Neither do I.

Szasz: It usually takes hundreds of years for people to see what they are doing. In my book, Martin Luther gets more credit than Karl Marx for helping to destroy the way in which the church and other social authorities once dominated an individual's life. Now we live in an age when medical priests and the bureaucrats in institutions such as the public schools dictate acceptable or desirable human behaviour. It took people hundreds of years to see that the selling of indulgences was a con game and it may take hundreds of years for them to see that psychiatrists and public school officials are now conning people and perhaps even themselves.

Swartz: Perhaps we need to have educational programs which tolerate and encourage people to be critical of alt social authorities and the ideas endorsed by these authorities. We talked earlier today about how Karl Popper's philosophy of science could lead to educational programs where doctors and other professionals might leant to improve their behaviour through criticism (see Bartley, 1982; Perkinson, 1980; Popper, 1963, 1970, 1974; Swartz, 1977, 1980, 1985). Do you think that the incorporation of a Popperian view of criticism might improve the way professionals function in institutions? Also, earlier we briefly discussed Jay Katz's ideas in his book The Silent World of Doctor and Patient (1984). In this book Katz seems to suggest that through education, doctors can be taught to share with their patients the power and responsibility for making decisions which affect a patient's life. Do you think that professional education should or can incorporate either a Popperian view of criticism or Katz's notions about a more desirable doctor-patient relationship?

Szasz: I don't like the idea of incorporating Popper's views on criticism into the education of doctors and other professionals. It's easy to make a philosophy of criticism into a new religion. I see no need to make criticism the new religion for professionals, such as doctors. Besides, I do not think that criticism should or can be institutionalized. It's important to protect the right of the critic to criticize, if you wish to live in a liberal society that values freedom, but the idea of making everyone a critic is not something I advocate or relish. If one can perform well as a professional without being a critic, then let someone else be a critic.

Swartz: Are you suggesting that we should not change the way professionals such as doctors affect our lives?

Szasz: Absolutely not! What I am suggesting is that the institutional power of professionals such as doctors cannot be changed by changing the way we educate them. I know Katz's book. He has offered a non-solution to a question such as, "How can we limit the power and authority that doctors have over their patients?" But you don't diminish the.power of the powerful by altering their education. Perhaps what we need is a constitutional amendment specifying the spheres in an individual's life which professionals cannot invade without the permission of the person who is receiving the professional's service.

Swartz: The idea of a constitutional amendment to limit the power of professionals such as doctors sounds good to me. But this idea is really quite impractical at this time. Also, my guess is that most people da not see doctors as a danger and in many ways people have happily handed power and responsibility over to them.

Szasz: Of course, that's just the point. Many people are happy to hand over responsibility for their health decisions to doctors. And at this time it is completely impractical to talk about the constitutional amendment for limiting the power of professionals. But we are trying to explore what would be an effective way to limit the power that certain professionals now have over our lives. My point about Katz is that you don't limit the power of doctors by changing the curriculum in medical schools.

Swartz: Katz does seem to suggest that the present medical education system teaches students to think and act in paternalistic ways. And for Katz the doctor-patient relationship should be based more on mutual co-operation between two adults rather than the present paternalistic model.

Szasz: The notion of replacing the present paternalistic medical model with one of mutual co-operation is not a bad idea. But I don't think you can curtail the power of doctors by merely suggesting that some people change the way the medical game is played. Some doctors who come under the spell of Katz's idea may indeed be able to make some minor alterations in the way they relate to some of their patients, but many doctors who attend medical schools which promote Katz's ideas may silently laugh to themselves as they prepare for their job as secular priests. I think it is naive to think that one could limit the power of doctors the way Katz suggests, but you could limit their power with the right kind of constitutional amendment.

Of course, this constitutional amendment idea is a long-range goal which may or may not be reached in 100 or even 200 years. I just don't believe that significant social change, of the kind we are talking about, can come about by tinkering with the curriculum of medical schools. As I told you earlier today, I think that my students who are studying to be psychiatrists make a big mistake if they think their patients are the only ones who are trapped by the present psychiatric system. Doctors too are trapped by it; they must conform to the social role of psychiatrist, as much as patients must conform to the social role of patient. And the complementary roles prescribed for doctors and patients are not going to change because of a change in medical education. Katz's idea about changing the curriculum in medical school is like telling a slave owner in ante-bellum Alabama to free his slaves. Freeing a few slaves while leaving the institution of slavery intact doesn't get at the problem of slavery.

Swartz: What you are describing here seems to be a sociological explanation for social change. You are using a game-playing model of group behaviour which implies that social institutions don't change significantly unless you can somehow alter the rules of the game in an explicit or legal sense (see Szasz, 1963, 1964).

Szasz: That's right. In my opinion, a person like Katz simply does not understand the problem of psychiatric power (see Szasz. 1976a. 1976b, 1977a, 1984, "Vatz & Weinberg. 1983).

Swartz: From what you have said it appears that you do not think there is much that an individual can do to change things in a social system. In effect you seem to see a role assignment as a given which does not allow for much leeway.

Szasz: Social roles are, of course, quite stable; they are hard to change, but it is possible to change them. It is also passible to reject one social role and embrace another. Individuals can vote with their feet, so to speak. For example, a white man who owned slaves in antebellum Alabama would sell his slaves, move to Boston, and find another way of making a living not requiring owning slaves. I like to think of myself sometimes in such a way. That is, although I am allowed — even expected — to perform ail sorts of coercive psychiatric interventions, I have chosen to reject psychiatric coercions, the so-called privileges granted to me as a doctor and psychiatrist. However, as long as it's legal for psychiatrists to treat children with drugs, there will be parents who will welcome this kind of intervention and psychiatrists happy to oblige them.

Briefly put, the individual often has some degree of autonomy within a role assignment. But significant social change requires a change in popular sentiment and in law.

Swartz: So persuasion and education will not really lead to significant social changes, as you see matters. And it appears to me that your criticism of child psychiatry is not directed toward individual child psychiatrists, but the social system that allows these people to treat children.

Szasz: Exactly. Child psychiatry is inevitable given the circumstances in which we now live. The adults responsible for taking care of children invite. even demand, child psychiatry, so the psychiatrists are not primarily responsible. Child psychiatrists just do their job, which is controlling and stigmatizing children. In past ages, children were abused in even worse ways. I just hope that in the future children will be abused less — that there will come a time when we will look back on child psychiatry and see it as we now see selling children into slavery or prostitution.

Analogizing child psychiatry to child labour might further clarify my view about this. Child labour is illegal in modern societies. Why? Surely not because working is bad for children. Child labour has been abolished because people-have come to realize how easy it is to abuse it. In other words, child labour has been abolished because child labour is likely to serve the interests of the parents rather than of the child. My argument about child psychiatry is similar. It should be abolished not because a child psychiatrist can never help a child, but because sending a child to a psychiatrist is an intervention too easily abused; it is ready-made to serve the interests of the parents rather than of the child.

Swartz: And it appears to me that your arguments suggest that as long as it's legal to have child psychiatrists, medical schools should prepare some people for these jobs.

Szasz: That's right.

Swartz: So under the present circumstances you condone the practice of having medical schools train people to become child psychiatrists.

Szasz: I condone this practice in the same sense that I condone the practice of educating priests to tell people they will go to hell if they masturbate.

Swartz: It appears that you do not think that medical schools or public school systems will lead the way in changing how psychiatrists function in school settings or with children.

Szasz: Of course not Educational systems are integral parts of society; they reflect what people think education should be. As long as people think that psychiatry is very important and very useful, they will want to use it everywhere — in hospitals, in courts, and, of course, in schools too.

Swartz: Before we end, I want to briefly say a word or two about our earlier comments related to having more alternative learning environments for students to choose from. I think we agree with one another that many students end up in the hands of psychiatrists and other psychotherapists partly because the public schools have a kind of monopoly on how to educate all kids. Moreover, from what you have said in the above, the educational institutions for these so-called helping professions are doing much to train new recruits for the present system. Thus, the helping professions arc helping to provide society with many individuals who function as handmaidens for the trend to conformity and sameness and away from freedom and autonomy.

Szasz: There is an intense ambivalence in our society toward sameness and differences. Perhaps that's a good thing. Public education certainly seems to me fashioned on the Procrustean model; but real life in America, life away from the public schools and academe, still celebrates the richness of variety. Perhaps our strait-jacketed system of public education is like a primitive sacrifice to the gods — we sacrifice choice, quality, and variety for our children so that the gods do not begrudge these goods to us as adults.

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